

Little Fish — Iqallungcuk

TAUGNA PIUGCINITAQA, IQALLUNGCUK MIKPAKARTUQ! – I DON'T WANT THAT (ONE), THE FISH IS TOO SMALL.



Photo: Little fish on the beach at Cape Alitak, 2010.

In the Alutiiq language, there is a distinction between fish of different sizes. If you want to speak of fish generally, you use the word *iqalluk*, but if you are referring to smaller fish like smelt, capelin, needlefish, or Pacific sand lance, you say *iqallungcuk*, or little fish. Herring fall somewhere in the middle and are called *iqalluarpak*. This term for herring comes from the word for smelt, *iqalluaq*. It is used by Yup'ik people and Alaska Peninsula Alutiiq people, and literally means, “big smelt.”

Little fish have many functions in the Alutiiq world. Small fish provide plentiful food for the animals Alutiiqs depend on. Where little fish congregate, Alutiiq people know they can also find halibut, salmon, seals, ducks, and other valued species.

Some little fish are eaten. Alutiiq families continue to fish for smelt in the springtime, catching them with poles or nets near the mouths of rivers. Smelt fishing is popular in nearshore waters, around river mouths. Smelt can be eaten fresh or processed for later use. Some families roll the entire fish in flour and fry them. Others squeeze the guts out, then soak the fish in brine, lay them on trays, and smoke them like salmon. Smelt may also be kippered: partially smoked and canned or preserved in salt.